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**A new Conception of the work of Art in
Schelling’s Consummate Philosophy**

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My presentation offers a short account of Schelling’s ideas concerning the *Philosophy of Art* (1804-5). I introduce here some particular aspects of his innovative theory of art in relation with his system of transcendental idealism. Schelling (1775-1854) is known both as an idealist and a romanticist philosopher. By utilizing German Idealism’s conception of aesthetics and the Romanticist conception of art, Schelling directs attention to the new elements and aspects of the work of art. The new themes comprised in his theory are the relation between being and beauty, truth value of the work of art, historical dimension of art, identity of the absolute and the finite as indifference in the work of art, and the conception of positive freedom exhibited through tragedy.

Just as Kant refines his transcendental philosophy in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Schelling relates different realms such as philosophy of nature and of spirit to each other in the same realm identified as the philosophy of art. By Schelling’s system of transcendental idealism and philosophy of art Kant’s dream proclaimed in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason* seems to be realized. This dream was the legitimate experience of the “unconditioned”. (Kant, 1965: 24). Although Kant does not let metaphysics grope randomly on mere concepts, the completeness of the series of conditions in Kant’s work fails to provide the legitimate experience of the unconditioned.

Until Schelling’s philosophy of art ‘being’ has been underestimated or completely disregarded in the domain of aesthetics and philosophy of art. Schelling introduces a ground breaking understanding of *Being* and recalls the forgotten relation between the concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘being.’ Through this sense of being he also restores a relation between truth and aesthetics.

According to Schelling Kant and Fichte do not understand the essence of transcendental philosophy. Kant's dream was to develop a consummate philosophy but it was not materialized. In the end his philosophy remained incomplete. A leap from theoretical to practical philosophy was his concluding action. The Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world is no longer accepted by Schelling. Kant tries to render everything to be rationally explained and understood in the dominance and limits of reason. But Schelling gives place to irrational factors in the formation of knowledge. Coming after Kant, Fichte gives absolute priority to a consciousness grounded in practical reason. He regards nature as an instrument for the ends of the mind. For Schelling, on the contrary, the understanding of transcendental philosophy involves moving beyond the circle of consciousness. Otherwise it would merely remain as a product of inner intuition. Moreover 'Being' would be forsaken when priority is given to consciousness.

Schelling's ideas on the subject of Being is so innovative that even the opposing critics of Hegel's conception of Being is rooted in Schelling's theory. About seventeen years after Hegel's *Logic* (1816) Schelling in 1833 presents an anti idealistic logic of the subject predicate relation. For Hegel concepts are nowhere but in consciousness. "They are, therefore, taken objectively, after nature, not before it; Hegel took them from their natural position by putting them at the beginning of philosophy. There he places the most abstract concepts first, becoming, existence, etc.; but abstractions cannot be there, be taken for realities, before that from which they are abstracted; becoming cannot be there before something becomes, existence not before something exists" (Schelling, 1994:145).

Taking into account all these disadvantages Schelling gives no priority to consciousness with respect to the objects of nature. For him Being comes before consciousness because no concept can exhaust the content of what is meant by Being.¹ In this way Schelling's philosophy of identity results from his rejection of the unbridgeable gap between subject and object. The difference between subject and object can appear only on the basis of a prior identity. Thus, against the negative philosophy of Hegel, Schelling develops a positive

¹ In contrast to the classical German Idealism, Early German Romanticism understands by Being Kantian supersensible ground of unity. For early German Romantic philosophers such as Hölderlin, Novalis and Schlegel absolute knowledge is not possible. They replace 'absolute knowledge' with 'an absolute not knowing'. By this background Schelling brings together both conflicting sides in his philosophy of identity.

understanding of the Absolute.² By this idea the law of contradiction is not offended. Schelling's philosophy of identity goes beyond the mind-body dichotomy and escapes the traps of representational thinking.

Schelling's philosophy of identity remained constant throughout his works. His conception of art emerges from this identity philosophy. In art activities of the rational and the irrational factor intersect. The essential insight of Schelling's greatest work *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) remains concealed so far as one tries to express it in the form of philosophical text. However this essential insight could be understood if the text is exhibited in the form of the work of art. Art is constructed as the identity of conscious and unconscious activity and through art, necessity and freedom are related to each other. Work of art is achieved as the embodiment of the ideal within the real. It appears as the product of an interplay between the absolute and the finite. Nothing is a work of art which does not exhibit this relation. (Schelling, 1993: 231). This interplay presents itself in different versions of triplicate forms in the history of art genres.

For Schelling organic life and mind cannot be accounted for by mechanical explanation. He explains mind as a product of the development of the organic process of nature. He regarded consciousness as a product of nature's development. Nature rises to self-consciousness in man and mind is essential only to man. With this characteristic man stands at the zenith of the nature. There is no need for a fatalist and irrational leap³ to the unknown 'thing-in-itself' or to the world beyond for the explanation of knowledge and of ideas such as freedom, soul and infinity. By attributing freedom to the nature of man Schelling made great contribution to the field of philosophy of nature. Schelling regards philosophy as "a work of freedom"⁴ Before nineteenth century the science failed to understand man as a free being. It failed to find a place for human freedom in nature.

Setting out from this concept of freedom Schelling attributed a new meaning to the faculty of imagination. The role of 'imagination' which is determined by German Idealist philosophers

² In Hegel's view the absolute is the result of the self cancellation of the finite. In this system finite determinations until reaching the Absolute knowledge successively overcomes each other to pass the next stage.

³ Kant made an irrational leap to give a rational explanation of freedom and the unconditioned. After Kant, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's (1743-1819) endless chain of conditioned conditions paves no way for freedom and the unconditioned.

⁴ F. W. J. Schelling, 'Introduction', *Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science*, Second Edition, 1803, in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. by Ernst Behler, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company (1987): 167.

as the servant of understanding under the yoke of reason is now attributed to the new conception of 'Being.' As a result, the divided nature of human being is made consummate. This consummate existence, at the same time, leads the philosopher to a conception of positive freedom.

In Schelling's system the first thought is the representation of myself as a free being. Through this free and self-conscious being all the world comes into existence out of nothing.⁵ And the highest activity of reason is aesthetic activity. Because of this highest place attributed to aesthetics, Schelling names a philosopher deprived of aesthetic sense as "*Buchstabenphilosoph*," philosopher of letter (Bernstein, 2003:186). Poetry is for Schelling is the highest and the oldest teacher of humanity. What humanity needs is only the unity of reason and heart and polytheism of imagination and the arts. By this reasoning Schelling implies an idea of new mythology. *The System of Transcendental Idealism* ends with the same proclamation of this urgent need. This result seems to be necessary in the course of the movement of nature. In accordance with this foresight Schelling transforms philosophy in a history of self-consciousness in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). By this work, the first time in the history of philosophy, thought gives a retrospective account of its own history for a consummate explanation of its own emergence. This process is initiated in inorganic nature, then it leads to organic nature and in the end it arrives at the emergence of consciousness.

In the task of demonstrating the chain of conditioned conditions, on the basis of the principle of sufficient reason, natural sciences remains unsuccessful thus they cannot make a legitimate use of the concept of the unconditioned or the Absolute. This task is already fulfilled by art. Art is not just determined by a conscious activity. What conceals itself from consciousness is understood by the help of the work of art. So art is a field of endless process of interpretation.

The work of art is a place of strife between conscious and unconscious activities. "The work of art reflects to us the identity of the conscious and unconscious activities... Besides what he has put into his work with manifest intention, the artist seems instinctively, as it were, to have

⁵ 'Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism' (1796) in *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, (ed. Bernstein, 2003: 185-187). Schelling's ideas in philosophy of art leads him to an ideal society ordered by the law of united human being. The text dated 1796 and titled as the *Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism* written as a result of companionship of three young romantic philosophers such as Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin.

depicted therein an infinity, which no finite understanding is capable of developing to the full” (Schelling, 1993: 225).

Because of its representative and imitative role, sensual or aesthetic intuition is accepted worthless with regard to the truth value of knowledge it contains. But now Schelling renders truth and beauty identical with each other. Schelling puts an end to the mimetic conception of art and of artistic activity. He equates truth with beauty and beauty with truth. “Beauty and truth are essentially or ideally one, for truth, just as beauty, is ideally the identity of the subjective and the objective” (Schelling, 1989:31). Beauty is not only a property of nature. And it has also truth value more than nature has. An artist can form an apparent unnatural particularity in his picture better than the real object in nature. Figures formed in the work of art are “ideas of philosophy intuited objectively or correctly” (Schelling, 1989:17).

For Schelling art is the identity or indifference of knowledge and activity: “Art is in itself neither mere activity nor mere knowledge, but is rather an activity completely permeated by knowledge, or, in a reverse fashion, knowledge which has completely become activity. That is, it is the indifference of both” (Schelling, 1989: 28).

Schelling does not contrast philosophy with art. Because art is not an unattainable place that can be reached only by a leap. For him philosophy is absolutely and essentially one and cannot be subdivided. There is only one essence and one absolute reality. This essence regarded as absolute is indivisible and “diversity among things is only possible to the extent that this indivisible whole is posited under various determinations” (Schelling, 1989:14). Schelling calls these determinations as potences. He observes several triplicities of these potences throughout his philosophy.

Schelling constructs historical dimension of art. In the first sentence of the *Philosophy of Art*, he makes his great contribution to philosophy of art by emphasizing “historical construction of art” (Schelling, 1989:3). Schelling is not satisfied with the education of art in the academy because it lacks knowledge of the historical construction of art works. For Schelling art is reached at as a product of historical existence of nature. He invokes a new form of time. Time is no more understood as a transcendental condition of experience that is pure and without content. For Schelling time is transformed into a stratum that exhibits itself in a historical movement. He determines a work of art within the conditions of time. In this determination he discusses individual forms of art in antithetical explanation as they reveal themselves throughout history.

What enables to disclose in actuality the identity of consciousness and the unconscious, of freedom and necessity, of the universal and the particular is the work of art. These dichotomous relations are represented in the work of art in three ways namely schmatic, allegoric and symbolic.⁶ The realm of the opposite unity Schelling looks for is found in language (Schelling, 1989:204). In poesy language is given its highest place. In contrast to formative art or plastic arts, poesy is the essence of art. For, rather than being an object that is created, it involves the act of producing and, as such, is the ideal side of art. (Schelling, 1989:202). “Every poetic genre is based on an idea.” (Schelling, 1989:221). Most notable genres of poetic art are the lyric, the epic and the dramatic. Articulation of a realm of unity of the opposites is considered to be the primary goal of the philosopher.

As we see, Schelling gets in contact with the absolute itself in the very beginning of his philosophy. For him “art is itself an emanation of the absolute” (Schelling, 1989:19) and there is no unbridgeable gap between the particular and the universal, or between the finite and the infinite. In positing the supreme unity of freedom and necessity in art, Schelling has achieved the consummate philosophy that philosophers before him had failed to live up to. By this fulfillment “consciously productive nature encloses and completes itself” (Schelling, 1993:236).

In conclusion, Schelling’s theory of art and new conception of the work of art put an end to the unbridgeable gap that was breached by modern theory of aesthetics between the finite and the infinite, or the particular and the universal. The philosophy of art completes the transcendental system of Schelling’s idealism.

⁶ “That representation in which the universal means the particular or in which the particular is intuited through the universal is schematism. That representation, however, in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular is allegory. The synthesis of these two, where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one, is the symbolic” (Schelling, 1989:46).

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